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Fall 2003

Reverend Thomas Fountain Blue

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Repository Citation

Jones, Reinette F, "Reverend Thomas Fountain Blue" (2003). *Library Faculty and Staff Publications*. 67.

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Notes/Citation Information

Published in *Kentucky Libraries*, v. 67, issue 4, p. 6-7.

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SPOTLIGHT: REVEREND THOMAS FOUNTAIN BLUE

BY REINETTE F. JONES

INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTS CENTER/KING STORAGE, UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY



Reverend Thomas Fountain Blue (1866-1935), the first formally trained African American librarian in Kentucky, was employed at the Louisville Free Public Library in 1905. His many accomplishments are listed in the following resolution of appreciation which was accepted by the American Library Association (ALA) at the 2003 Annual Conference.

RESOLUTION OF APPRECIATION OF REVEREND THOMAS FOUNTAIN BLUE

WHEREAS, Reverend Thomas Fountain Blue became the first formally trained African American librarian in the state of Kentucky in 1905 and went on to influence librarianship in Kentucky, in the South, and across the United States; and

WHEREAS, Reverend Blue supervised the establishment of the second library in Kentucky that was exclusively for African Americans, located in three rooms of a house in Louisville, Kentucky in 1905; and

WHEREAS, Reverend Blue was the first African American to manage public libraries with an entire African American staff, and this was done within the first Carnegie Colored Libraries that were located in Louisville, Kentucky in 1908 and 1914; and

WHEREAS, Within the Louisville Western Colored Branch Library in 1912, Reverend Blue led the establishment of library education for African Americans in the United States; and

WHEREAS, The Louisville library training program resulted in the inclusion of African Americans in the public libraries workforce, with the initial impact being in the South and later spreading to other states in the U.S.; and

WHEREAS, Reverend Blue was the first African American to be placed on an American Library Association program in June 1922, when he spoke in Detroit, Michigan at the 2nd Annual Work with Negroes Round Table. The topic was the training of Negro librarians; and

WHEREAS, The Louisville library training program was used as a prototype for the establishment of academic library training exclusively for African Americans, beginning in 1925 at Hampton Institute in Virginia, which gave rise to the American Library Association accrediting library programs for African Americans; and

WHEREAS, Reverend Blue established the 1st Conference for Colored Librarians at Hampton Institute, March 15-18, 1927, and assisted with the 2nd Negro Library Conference held at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, November 20-23, 1930; and

WHEREAS, The Louisville Carnegie Colored Libraries were seeds that grew beyond the borders of Kentucky and the United States, and these libraries served as the prototype for establishing the Carnegie Non-European library service in South Africa in 1928; and

WHEREAS, the American Library Association, the state of Kentucky, and many other states are faced with the challenge of recruiting, educating, and retaining African American librarians; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the American Library Association recognizes the leadership role of Reverend Thomas Fountain Blue in laying the foundation for the continued presence of African American libraries, library students, and library employees in all types of libraries within the United States and abroad; and be it further

RESOLVED, that copies of this resolution will be given to the Kentucky Library Association, Louisville Free Public Library, Jerry E. Abramson - Mayor of Louisville, Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, Kentucky Association of Blacks in Higher Education, Kentucky Alliance of Black School Educators, Special Libraries Association/Kentucky Chapter, South-eastern Library Association, Library Administration and Management Association, the Black Caucus of the American Library Association, and the Library and Information Association of South Africa.

THE MAKING OF THE RESOLUTION

This proclamation was the end result of several months of planning and the coordinated networking effort of many persons and organizations. It all began late in 2002 during a brainstorming session with interested persons from various fields to discuss ways of bringing positive attention to the declining numbers of African American librarians in Kentucky. A resolution honoring Reverend Blue was suggested by Dr. Deborah Williamson who is a general manager at the Kentucky Administrative Office of the Courts. Her idea became a plan of action. A resolution draft was written and copies were distributed to various organizations. It was hoped that there would be sufficient endorsements from these organizations before the resolution was taken to the next ALA Conference.

Kentucky Library Association President Sue Burch took the draft before the KLA board members. Christie Robinson, the KLA representative to the Southeastern Library Association, took a copy to Atlanta for endorsement during the SELA Board and Committees Meeting. Sandra D. Moore, special assistant to the Provost for University Diversity at Eastern Kentucky University, presented a copy to the Kentucky Association of Blacks in Higher Education. Sandra is past-president of KABHE and a member of the executive committee. Susan Brown, Public Relations and Diversity Leadership Committee chair for the Special Libraries Association Kentucky had the resolution added to that organization's board meeting agenda. The resolution received the endorsement of each organization. There were also endorsements from the Louisville Free Public Library, the ALA Library Administration and Management Association, and the Black Caucus of the American Library Association. While the resolution was being discussed in various board meetings, Linda Stith was referring to the ALA guide on resolution formats and processes. Linda, the Kentucky chapter councilor for ALA, left no stone unturned in getting the right meetings, dates and times for presenting the resolution. She spent a lot of time emailing ALA for clarifications, asking "Are you sure that is the process for an honorary resolution?"

Along the way there were a few false starts and stops. How many people would be needed to second the resolution at ALA? Did the resolution have to be presented during the mid-winter conference or during the annual conference? While these questions were being clarified, everyone was scrambling to get things in order, just in case the resolution had to be ready by the earlier date. That was when we began to hear from other librarians, and for the most part, their words were embodied. Some sent kudos to Kentucky. The attention was welcomed. Suggestions for format changes were also received, and the intentions were welcomed. But the line had to be drawn when it was suggested that the resolution draft be completely overhauled to add some "razz-a-ma-tazz," and that there should be at least fifty endorsements. The recommendation was graciously acknowledged.

When all was said and done, the schedule was reaffirmed to present the resolution during the ALA Annual Conference which was being held in Toronto, Canada from June 19-24, 2003. No "razz-a-ma-tazz"; and time would not allow a fifty-state endorsement package. By the end of April the resolution was ready; and we were one month ahead of schedule.

During the ALA conference, Linda Stith presented the finished product to the Resolution Committee and Dr. Ling Hwey Jeng seconded it. Dr. Jeng is an ALA councilor-at-large and she is also an assistant professor at the School of Library and Information Science at the University of Kentucky. The ALA Resolution Committee checked for format accuracy and all was well. The resolution to Reverend Thomas Fountain Blue was then presented at the Membership Meeting and at the third Council Session where it was received as proclamation.

Preparing a resolution like this, and getting it passed, is a huge undertaking. But it is essential that people like Reverend Blue, who have contributed much to our profession, be recognized and honored for their accomplishments. THANK YOU to everyone involved.

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